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YUGOSLAVIA:

Threats of Ethnic Violence Growing

*Tensions between the Serb minority and ethnic Albanian majority in Yugoslavia's Kosovo Province seem likely to turn violent—perhaps on a fairly broad scale—in the next six months.*

Kosovo Serbs have demonstrated repeatedly against alleged discrimination by the largely Albanian provincial leadership and are now openly advocating violence. At a rally early this month, speakers called for a return to the official repression of Albanians that occurred in the 1960s and for Serbs to take up arms. Some Serb officials have prescribed purging and executing Albanian officials and colonizing the province with Serbs while expelling 400,000 ethnic Albanians to neighboring Albania.

The Serbian republic leadership, which in the past has constrained popular nationalism, is openly divided as different factions manipulate Serb nationalism to win support. A senior party official was dismissed recently after accusations of being soft on the Albanians. Moderate ethnic Albanian leaders, who had served as a buffer between Serbia and Kosovo's population, have lost all credibility with both sides.

Military leaders have said publicly that government troops in Kosovo are being harassed, although by which side is unclear. One general said recently that the Army fears being drawn into "another Northern Ireland."

A small spark could provoke either side to violence. The national political leadership is divided and has no good ideas for striking a compromise between Serb demands and Albanian population growth that is overwhelming the Serbs in Kosovo. Serbian and Albanian leaders, by themselves, are unlikely to come to terms.

Provincial police are also divided by ethnic tensions and may be reluctant to act, particularly in the wake of firings last spring after a confrontation with Serb demonstrators. Poor handling by local police could dramatically worsen unrest. Should violence erupt beyond the village level, national leaders would send the Army, but even troops might need a few days to several weeks to contain the unrest.

Any violence, although unlikely to damage the economy, probably would stiffen Belgrade's resistance to Western creditor demands for austerity that might cause social unrest elsewhere. A crackdown on unrest might expose Belgrade to Western charges of human rights violations.

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